



United States
Department of
Agriculture

Forest
Service

Idaho Panhandle
National Forests

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File Code: 1950

Date: September 9, 2004

Dear Interested Reader,

I would like to provide you with an update on the Quartz Gold Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) and explain what has happened since the start of this project.

As many of you know we first started looking at this project area in the summer of 2001. After a year and a half of gathering information on the ground and taking comments from many of you a proposed action was developed and sent out in January of 2003. We had a public meeting (February 2003) and a field trip (July 2003) to discuss what the Forest Service proposed in the Quartz Gold Project Area. Most of our analysis of the proposed action and alternatives to the proposed action took place this past winter and spring (2003/2004).

In 2003 the team silviculturist identified a changed condition in the Gold Creek drainage. The mountain pine beetle had advanced so much since the original proposal that some of the proposed vegetation treatments would not be effective in treating areas infested with the mountain pine beetle. Those of you who were able to attend our field trip in July of 2003 will remember that we discussed the mountain pine beetle and viewed some of bug killed trees at that time.

The interdisciplinary team was already analyzing the original proposal which included much more than the Gold Creek Drainage. It was late in the season to field verify the changed condition, so the acting District Ranger decided to continue the analysis of the proposed action and alternatives as planned and address the changed condition between the draft EIS and the final EIS. At that time we were expecting to have the draft EIS ready for public review in early spring of 2004. As you know we did not get a draft EIS out this spring.

After looking at the changed condition on the ground this summer with many of the Idaho Panhandle National Forests' specialists and regional insect and disease experts, I have decided to address the mountain pine beetle in the lodgepole pine in the Gold Creek Drainage immediately. Because of the new information gathered from insect and disease flights and the on-the-ground validation, I am proposing a new project in the Quartz Gold Project Area.

It is important for us to address this problem now – because our options will be limited if we are not ready for implementation by summer 2005. Many of the lodgepole pine trees infested and/or killed by the mountain pine beetle will not be merchantable past next summer. We will not have the ability to utilize timber harvest as a method to reduce future downed and dead fuels in the Broadaxe drainage, and will have to live with the inevitable increased fuel loadings.

I plan to address the mountain pine beetle situation in Gold Creek under the Healthy Forests Restoration Act. We can address this problem in a reasonable, sensible and responsible manner with collaboration and input from you along with the information we gather on the ground.



In the original Quartz Gold Project we addressed many other resource issues (access, watershed conditions relative to roads, wildlife, white bark pine and fisheries habitat projects etc). This will not be lost. We listened to and addressed many of your comments and concerns about the Quartz Gold Project Area and our original proposal. We adjusted the proposed action, developed alternatives to it, and completed the analysis of these projects. Some of this work may be included in the new proposal, and the rest of it may continue after we address the mountain pine beetle problem in Gold Creek.

You will be hearing from me shortly about the changed condition in the Quartz Gold drainage so we can collaborate on a new proposal. I would like to schedule a field trip to look at the area and discuss a proposal. I have September 26 through October 2, 2004 open for a field review. Please let me know if you are interested in attending and whether a week day or a weekend day is better for you. I will pick a date that will accommodate the most people.

Sincerely,

CHARLES A. MARK
District Ranger